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TAGS: PGOV KCRM KJUS ASEC SNAR ES GT
SUBJECT: GUATEMALAN MINISTER OF GOVERNMENT DIES IN HELICOPTER CRASH

¶1. (U) On June 27, Minister of Government Carlos Vinicio Gomez Ruiz, along with Vice Minister of Government Edgar Hernandez Umana and two pilots, died in a helicopter crash. The four men were returning from a ceremony in the department of Peten when their helicopter crashed in a remote and mountainous area in the department of Baja Verapaz. There was no indication of foul play. Bad weather is widely believed to have caused the accident, but Guatemalan authorities will investigate the crash.

¶2. (U) Rescue efforts were hampered by bad weather and the remoteness of the crash site, but locals report that the four men died on impact. Rescue workers and members of the Guatemalan military recovered the bodies after an 18-hour roundtrip hike from the nearest point accessible by air. On June 28, the bodies were returned to Guatemala City, with religious and memorial services held the following day. The day after the crash, President Alvaro Colom publicly stated that he had decided on Gomez' replacement, but he has thus far only stated that the replacement will not be a current or former member of the military.

¶3. (SBU) Gomez served as the Vice Minister of Government (March 2007- January 2008) under the prior administration, and the Embassy had developed a close working relationship with him. Hernandez Umana served as a PNC Chief in the late 1990s and as Chief of Security for Congress prior to his appointment in January as Vice Minister of Government.

¶4. (SBU) Gomez' death, along with the death of one of the most effective members of his management team, could set back the GOG's efforts to improve the country's security situation. Gomez played a key role in reducing violent crime rates when he was Vice Minister in 2007 and Minister in 2008.

Derham